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ABSTRACT

One proposed model of the writing process describes writing as a dynamic, three dimensional, interactive process. It is dynamic in that it changes in intensity proportionate to the sophistication of the student and the teacher. It is three dimensional and interactive because, similar to the gears within a clock, it is composed of a number of smaller, dependent processes that continuously interact with and support one another. These dependent processes are the teacher, the teacher's responsibilities, the student, and the students' responsibilities, all of whose interactions are facilitated through the assignment. If the instructor's teaching style is affected by positive elements, then the teacher will most likely be effective in implementing the responsibilities of organizing, stimulating, focusing, conferencing, assessing, and diagnosing. Unlike teacher responsibilities, student responsibilities do not represent clearly defined, distinct stages but encompass rehearsing, drafting, evaluating, revising, editing, producing, and presenting. The last major component in the writing process model is the assignment, the communicative link between teacher expectations and student performance. When students know the objectives, receive direct instruction concerning the objectives, understand how the assignment will be evaluated, and have the prerequisite skills to handle the new challenge, teachers can expect positive results. (HOD)

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TEACHING WRITING IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN HANDING OUT THE PAPER

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TEACHING WRITING IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN HANDING OUT THE PAPER

As the teacher passed out the paper, he explained to the class that for today the students would write compositions concerning what they wanted to do when they grew up. The teacher then distributed writing paper and sat down to grade yesterday's assignments.

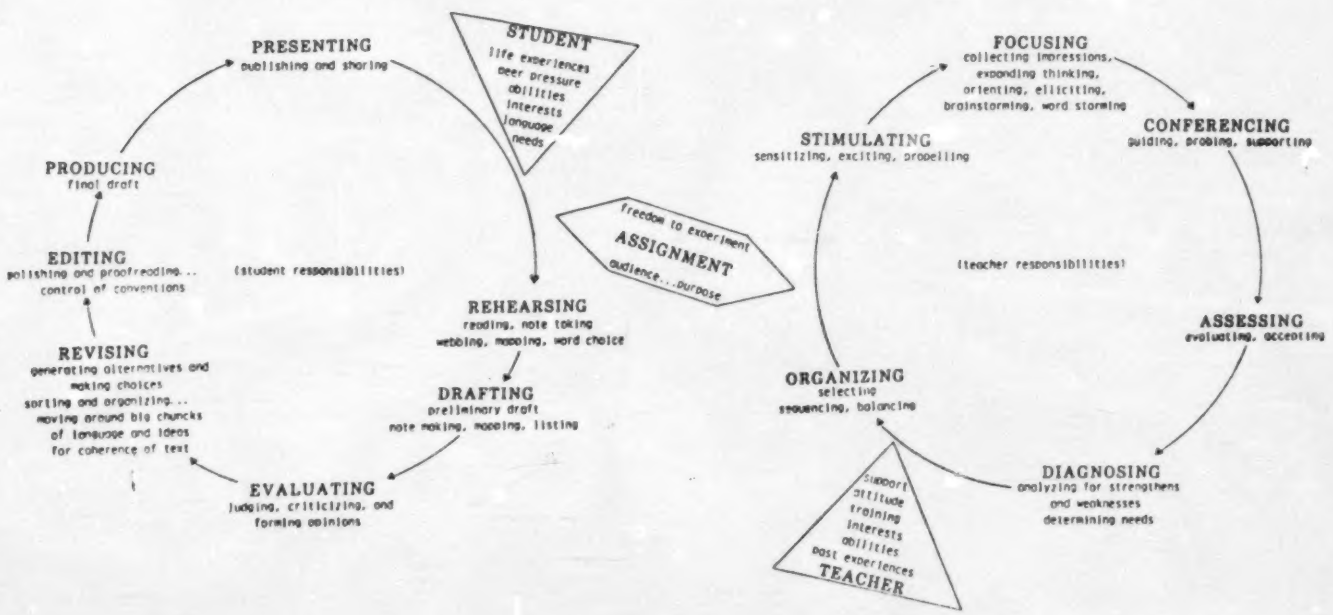
"HOLD IT!" Did this teacher really expect his students to produce quality writing by simply passing out paper and telling students to write? Although the ultimate goal of teaching writing is to promote self-reliance and eventual total control and responsibility for the writing process, didn't this teacher know that he has responsibilities, that children do need degrees of stimulation and guidance, and that teaching writing is more than just constructing assignments and grading the papers?

The students may have been writing, but the teacher was not teaching writing. This "teaching" scenario is typical of classrooms where writing is viewed as a frill, as void of educational consequence, or as a useful strategy for filling dead time. But by its very definition, teaching implies an intentional purpose. At the very least, teaching writing implies rearranging or stimulating the student's informational base, so that an aspect of this life or a life experience can be viewed creatively.

Writing is a dynamic process, which when understood and properly implemented, has tremendous educational significance. However, defining writing as a dynamic process is accurate but simplistic.

There are actually several significant processes that must be recognized when one speaks about writing. More correctly, then, writing should be defined as a dynamic, three-dimensional, interactive process.

The writing process is dynamic in that it changes in intensity, proportionate to the sophistication of the student and the teacher. The writing process is three-dimensional and interactive because, similar to the gears within a clock, it is composed of a number of smaller, dependent processes which continuously interact with and support one another. These dependent processes are the teacher, the teacher's responsibilities, the student, and the student's responsibilities, all of whose interactions are facilitated through the assignment.



THE TEACHER

Each teacher unintentionally enhances or detracts from the quality of the final writing product. As the classroom's central modeling figure who designs and implements educational programming, the teacher brings to the writing process an important variable, himself. Each educator's teaching style has been stimulated by several elements. These are past experiences, attitudes, training, interests, abilities, and administrative support.

These elements are interrelated and integrated in their contribution to the total composition of the teacher and his approach to the teaching of writing. Teaching writing is hard work and if, for example, the instructor has little training, no administrative support, or little interest in what is being taught, then prospects for quality writing are severely limited. If, on the other hand, the instructor's teaching style is effected by positive elements, then the teacher will most likely be effective in implementing responsibilities.

TEACHER RESPONSIBILITIES

Teacher responsibilities include organizing, stimulating, focusing, conferencing, assessing, and diagnosing.

Expecting that students will participate in their own education and will write is essential. However, in order to maximize the educational benefits of the writing process, the teacher must be tenacious in maintaining high expectations and must design strong

programs. For example, many studies have found that schools which demonstrate superior student performance have established climates of positive expectations for all students and strong instructional management systems that organize and deliver instruction.

Organizing

Organizing includes the establishment of goals and objectives which constitute the scope of the classroom's educational program. An effective writing program balances the student's skill development and integrates writing across the curriculum.

Organizing also implies valuing and choosing. At this stage, the teacher organizes for instruction by selecting objectives for short and long term implementation. These objectives are facilitated through an appropriate context for which specific assignments are designed and finally into thematic units which provide for skill mastery.

Stimulating

As an introduction to the assignment and the skill, the teacher implements an activity or series of activities appropriately designed to stimulate the student. This activity or activities can be designed to inform, persuade, or sensitize the learner, or simply to excite the student's curiosity.

Here the teacher is a facilitator. He involves the students in a science experiment, takes them on a field trip, allows them to cook

or to taste foods, or involves them in an art experience. The teacher brings in a local sports hero, designs an interesting display, reads to the students, or promotes a student discussion concerning a topic of interest. No matter what route the teacher selects, the effective stimulus activities are those that relate to the student's interests, needs, or abilities.

Focusing

Effective teaching implies a planned change in learner behavior. Focusing provides the teacher with a structure for promoting change and for avoiding the tendency for the student to simply move words from their heads to the papers. Through focusing, the teacher orients the student to the task while he expands the student's awareness of the topic content.

The teacher involves the class in collecting and sharing impressions; in this stage he is expanding student thinking, orienting them towards new ways of viewing the issue or topic. He promotes brainstorming and collects words and phrases which relate to the topic. Finally, he creates lists on charts or the board, thereby provides the students with a visual rubic from which to expand.

Conferencing

At this point some students begin to write, but others may be still need assistance. As the teacher increases individualized instruction, he may need to further stimulate some students or to

assist others through more focusing activities. At this stage of teacher responsibilities called conferencing, the teacher guides, probes, and supports.

In the conferencing process the teacher acts as a resource. He asks questions, listens to ideas, or just shows interest. For a few seconds or a few minutes, the teacher acts and reacts to student needs at the time when help is most benefical.

Conferencing continues through each stage of student responsibilities. The teacher assumes the role of a learner and carefully listens to assist the writer in expanding ideas. He aids the writer to examine her decisions about the composition. The teacher clarifies word choice options and acts as an audience to provide feedback to encourage clarity and preciseness.

Assessing

As the student progresses through the assignment, and until she publishes, the teacher inventories the strengths and weaknesses of the product and the student. This stage, assessment, is an important component of the teacher responsibilities within the writing process. This evaluation process, whether formal or informal, measures growth and strengthens future adjustments. However, since writing is dynamic and far more flexible than the traditional aspects of the classroom curriculum, there is less agreement as to how writing should be assessed.

Many approaches can be utilized in assessing a student's ability to write effectively and efficiently. Hartnett, 1978, suggested that

these methods can be categorized as either atomistic or holistic.

Atomistic approaches to the evaluation of writing competence view a composition as a collection of features. These assessments are usually limited to detecting errors in capitalization, grammar, punctuation, and logic. According to Hartnett these methods often test copy reading skills rather than the ability to use language effectively; they also usually test the facets of English that are easiest to assess.

Conversely, holistic evaluation of writing includes any method that sorts or rank orders compositions without specifically enumerating the linguistic, rhetorical, or informational features. Holistic approaches assume either that the features are too numerous or complex to assess separately, or that the whole of the discourse has an effect beyond the sum of its parts.

There are several methods by which writing can be evaluated holistically. However, all holistic evaluation is concerned with an overall impression of how well a writer communicates ideas in response to a particular task. These include:

(1) dichotomous scales which list features to check as present or absent in a compostion

(2) analytic scales which allow a wider range of responses regarding each feature and can include elaborate descriptions of each feature and definitions of high, middle, and low scores

(3) general impression marking which utilizes mental rubic developed from rating discussions but no formal guidelines

(4) center of gravity responses which provide informal feedback to assist revisions but are not intended for scoring

(5) feature analysis or primary trait scoring which depends on narrow assessments of features relevant to specific assignments and
(6) focused holistic scoring which depends on pre-defined criteria designed to isolate a single, overall purpose which is clearly stated or implied in the assignment

The most widely used holistic evaluation strategies are general impression scoring, developed by Educational Testing Service, and primary trait scoring, developed in use in the National Assessment of Educational Progress.

Diagnosing

While assessment deals more generally with determining the strengths and the weaknesses of the student and of the written work, diagnosing involves specific examination and analysis of the nature and circumstances of the student's performance. At this stage, the teacher formulates conclusions and recommendations for future teaching.

The teacher diagnoses for specific reasons. He examines the appropriateness of teaching strategies for skill mastery. He analyses the learning styles of the students in relation to the constraints of the assignment and towards the development of new assigments. Finally, he reviews error patterns and prescribes new interventions. As the teacher completes these tasks, he again organizes for instruction.

THE STUDENT

As the teacher's background influences the quality of the student's writing product, so do the student's language abilities, interests, needs, and life experiences. The most important variable which the student brings to the writing process is her life elements, a combination of her formal culture in the sense of family, and of her informal culture, which includes her peers and "generation." Therefore, developing effective writing assignments begins with an understanding of the student as an individual.

Just as every teacher has a teaching style, every student has a unique learning style or a preferred way of learning. Regardless of whether the student is conscious of her style, the style largely determines when, where, and what information the student is able to acquire, as well as how she can most effectively process information. Learning style, then, is the way in which the individual responds to the environmental and cognitive stimuli around her.

Dunn, 1981, identified twenty-one elements of learning style; that the physical arrangements of an environment can greatly affect a student's ability to concentrate and learn, and a that learner's environmental needs may vary with the task. White, 1983, noted that grouping for instruction involves issues of learning style. Whether the student works best alone or in a group must therefore be considered. Holland, 1982, stressed the importance of structuring of learning situations as a component of learning style. This includes scheduling, teacher assistance, and the level of student independence granted by the teacher.

Wash, 1977, found that students have a colorful language, filled with poetic images and unique word useage, which they tend to lose

once they have undergone "proper" language teaching; by the time most students have reached the middle grades their poetic tendencies have been successfully dulled to conformity. It is possible, stressed Holbrook, 1981, that the problem is not so much that teachers are neglecting to teach writing; rather, they may simply be overlooking the fact that students already can write.

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

The student responsibilities within the writing process include rehearsing, drafting, evaluating, revising, editing, producing, and presenting. Unlike the stages of teacher responsibilities, student responsibilities are much less clearly defined and overlap more fully.

Rehearsing

Given an assignment, the student reacts, or plans. Depending on her sophistication and the constraints and parameters of the assignment, she may choose a preliminary title, may decide to research the assignment more fully by reading or talking with others, or may collect notes or summarize main points. She may also select a writing posture and form in which to develop the assignment.

As the student begins to plan, she may already be rehearsing word choice, opening lines, or plots. However, rehearsing continues throughout the student responsibilities. Rehearsing provides the important low-risk function for promoting crystallization of the

topic's elements without the burden of evaluation.

The student may rehearse through techniques such as mapping, webbing, or creating word lists. Mentally rehearsing or physically drawing may be used to visualize relationships in plot or settings. Further, rehearsing can take the form of talking or conferencing with the teacher or peers.

Drafting

Developing a preliminary draft is the next stage of student responsibility. Here again, note making, mapping, listing or drawing are preliminary drafts.

At this stage, the student is not concerned with the conventions of the language. She, as a writer, is merely attempting to generate thoughts onto paper. These thoughts may appear disjointed or even irrational. The student's product may be full of run-on sentences and inventive spellings, but at this stage in the process the student is focusing on the development of the larger ideas. In order to promote an atmosphere for writing fluency, grammatical and spelling revisions must be made at a later stage.

Evaluating

Having completed a rough draft of either the entire assignment or of one aspect of the assignment, the student moves into the next stage, evaluating. In evaluating, the student is usually involved in an informal process. She involves herself in judging, criticizing, and

forming opinions about what she has written. She examines how the draft sounds or flows, evaluates whether her written product is logical and cohesive and whether word choice is appropriate.

Revising

In revising, the student is aware of the audience. She views the draft as tenative, and as such, makes choices and generates alternatives. She accepts the whole or a part. She changes words. She may even reject the whole product and return to the planning stage.

At the revising stage, the student becomes objective. She is involved with sorting and organizing ideas and with moving around big chunks of language for coherence of text.

Editing

Although minor editing may permeate all of the previous stages, it is at this point at which the student is generally satisfied with the sequence and the content of her message and at which she becomes involved with large scale polishing and proofreading. It is here in the writing process that grammatical conventions are indispensible. The control of conventions is paramount because the message will next be presented to a real audience and must be clear. It is at this stage, therefore, and not before, that polishing is the major consideration.

Producing

When the conventions have been reviewed, the basic product is complete. At this stage called producing, the product is submitted to the teacher for approval or it is filed away for future presentation. This final draft does not necessarily require sharing or presenting.

Presenting

If presenting is desired, the student will be involved in forms of publishing and sharing. In this stage the student is involved with conveying her writing to real readers. Presenting could be as simple as posting the completed work on the board or as complex as entering the product in competition.

THE ASSIGNMENT

The last major component in the writing process model is the assignment. The assignment is the communicative link between teacher expectations and student performance. When students are given clearly stated objectives, are given direct instruction concerning the objectives, are aware of how the assignment will be evaluated, and have the prerequisite skills to handle the new challenge, teachers can expect positive results.

Audience and Purpose

Two factors within the assignment are the audience and the purpose. Just as a person does not write without some reason or purpose, wrote O'Donnell, 1982, neither does a person write without an intended audience or reader. She added that written communication at its most basic level includes a writer (who) trying to say something (what) to a reader (whom) to create an effect (response). While an audience can ultimately provide feedback or response to a piece of writing, the early identification of that audience can also help the writer select a topic, determine the content of writing, and influence choice of vocabulary.

Summary

The purpose of this model is to describe writing as a three-dimensional interactive process. Although it does not advocate any one approach, this model does emphasize a collaborative structure where student self-reliance is cultivated and nutured. It must be realized, however, that both the teacher and the student must have time to develop in sophistication.

Students will not instantly switch from teacher-dominated to self-directed writers. Learning to write effectively and effeciently is hard work, but this will never happen in the classroom where writing is not taught.

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